



Testimony in Support of SB2

Dear Chairs Linehan and Anwar, Vice Chairs Welander and Bradley, Ranking Members Martin and Dauphinais, and Members of the Committee on Children,

My name is Grace Whittington. I am a resident of New Haven and am testifying to communicate my strong support for Connecticut's SB2: *An Act Concerning The Safety, Education And Social Equity Of Children In Response To The Pandemic*.

SB2 is a comprehensive bill that aims to support and protect Connecticut's children in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. This bill is critical in ensuring that children are adequately taken care of during a time when evidence suggests that the social isolation and loss of in-person services caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has increased teen suicide rates across the U.S. ([AAP & NPR](#)). SB2 also ensures that students in the care of the Commissioner Children and Families have virtual visitation opportunities with their custodial families and guardians to ensure that we are actively acknowledging and opposing the isolation these children are surely feeling.

On top of the mental health provisions that SB2 includes, it also addresses the rampant socioeconomic and racial inequality in Connecticut's schools that often leave poor students of color without access to proper mental health resources. Across the state of CT, public schools remain quite segregated. There is a \$639 million funding gap between public school districts with BIPOC student populations of at least 25% and districts with white student populations greater than 75% ([CT School & State Finance Report](#)), so it is often students of color with fewer mental health resources.

As an elementary school student, I grew up relying on the dependability of weekly meetings with my school social worker after my mother passed away in 2008. In a time when many students are facing the loss of loved ones, SB2 ensures that students are able to get the virtual and in-person mental health options that they need to be socially, emotionally, and academically stable during this extremely challenging time.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges students face every day. The effects of this pandemic, especially in children and adolescents will be felt for years, even after everyone has returned to in-person learning. SB2 seeks to address equitable access to mental health resources and training for students across Connecticut, especially Black and Brown children and

children living in poverty. Passing this bill would be a crucial step in addressing and improving the social-emotional and educational outcomes of all students in the state.

I strongly support SB 2 and urge you to favorably vote the bill out of the Committee on Children.

Sincerely,

Grace Whittington
New Haven, CT